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From the Californian.

SAND.

BY J. W. GA...

(Continued from ... week.)

The western slope of the Sierra Nevada, from the seas to the summits, is a long undulation of land, down through which the rains and snows meander to the great salt waters of the world, winding among green woods and a various vegetation; the eastern slope is a "jumpoff" into the corrugated basin of the desert, where all the streams are swallowed by the earth, and from whose summit the eastward-gazing grizzly bear, chained by the sunbeam, lifts his flexible nostrils to sniff the odor of the arid waste, then slowly turns about and prowls to westward. Two worlds seem here to meet; vegetable and animal life have no communion across the line; on one side there is abundant rain, snow, fog, and moisture; on the other side are wide wastes of gray pastures in the drought, cold, and dust.

To the eastward of this line, in a quartz-mining camp, where the object is precious metal, there are no gardens, shade-trees, lawns, front-yards, home flowers, or ornamental enclosures of any sort. After such a camp becomes a town or city, with a far-fetched costly supply of water, the green and growing luxuries appear in tiny garden-spots, large windows, and in trees which are irrigated at the roots by underground troughs and wooden spouts—trees which are, in fact, brought up by hand. But the newer town, which is still a mining camp, knows nothing of planted greenness; and if it is situated in the great empire of Artemisia, where silver and gold are married in the volcanic chambers of the awful past, there is no spontaneous greenness fresher than a random, bristling nut-pine, or a sprawling arid juniper. The general tone of the whole landscape is gray, inclining to drab; and yet here and there are sporadic hills breaking out from the general coloring, which present tints shading and blending into each other in a way so delicate that no painter yet dares put them on canvas, because the public can not understand what the public has not seen the like of, and for which the public can find no use.

Nevertheless, the mining region is a country of beautiful natural surprises. Nowhere, not even in the vaunted blowzy flora of the tropics, does Nature paint with a touch so delicate or a split so masterful. There is, so to speak, a charming dramatic stage effect in the scenery of this vast land. The clear, dry, dewless air offers no screen to kill the shadows painted by the sun, the moon, or the stars. Night or day, the stray, infrequent cloud, which floats before the skyward breeze or sleeps lazily along the blue, casts its counterpart in a dark, moving shadow upon the gray valley or among the pulseless concourse of the hills. The thirsty and far-wandering "prospector," seeking, among the pyramids of granite, the spires of porphyry, the slopes of slate, the castles of lime, the columns of basalt, for one sweet spring of living water, finds instead a mountain of rock-salt, glittering like a glass dome among the sterile hills, to tantalize his parching tongue and mock him with a majesty of art he has neither the time nor the patience to enjoy.

Under foot, the world is dry, gray, silent. Overhead, during the long, cloudless day, it is pale-blue, dry, silent. All abroad, it is gray, or dark with mountains distant, and it is silent. Silence is everywhere. No tide of restless seas rolls throbbing to the shore-lines on the rocks—the seas are dead and gone. No roar of far-off torrent tumbling down the hills to jar the night air underneath the stars—the stars still are, but all the torrents have departed. In this land the valleys have been seas, the canons have been torrent-beds, the slopes have been the dwelling-place of men who dealt with fire, stone-headed arrows, earthen pots, and shell-wrought vanities; but at some lost period, backward of all dates, the Great High Sheriff of the universe, in open court, has cried "Silence!" and has been obeyed.

Across these gray valleys, under these silent shadows, and among these curious hills, winds the long, drab-colored ribbon of the wagon-road on its way to the town. It, too, is silent, save far forward in the dusty distance, where the outcasts in a piebald picture answers with straining necks the profane shout that urges it along; or far backward, where the lines of lengthy ears mark time to mulish feet, to creaking leather, and to clanking chains, and all that makes a mule-team musical to the ears of the silent man who sits upon his laboring beast, jogging from left to right, from right to left, the whole day long; or between these teams, or before or behind them, the croaking big black raven may strut and croak in answer to some far-off wolf upon a low hill, howling at the plain. All is silent. No house along that way. No barking watch-dog sitting at a gate. No children home bound, book in hand, from school. No crowing cocks, no lowing herds, no bleating lambs—no anything, but silence and the shadows and the gray.

Through such a land, on such a road, young Mr. Maydole made his way toward the treeless, sunburnt mining town. He found it in one of these deserted torrent-beds which the American man of the Occident calls a canon. Two feeble lines of houses, with a stony street between; two rocky lines of ragged hills, from whose rough faces, like numerous bugnoses, jutted the half built, half dug-out miners' cabins, and one large, noisy building in the town, from whose high chimneys came clouds of smoke and puffs of steam. When the two-horse spring wagon, which the proprietor thereof called a stage, pulled up in front of the office building pertaining to the larger structure, our hero alighted, unheralded, unattended, unacquainted, and unwelcomed. His few personal effects were rapidly piled out after him upon the step of the office, and the stage drove away, leaving him an entire stranger "in the cold world."

With his usual directness of purpose, he presented himself to the person behind the desk, and, finding that person to be the party to whom his credentials were addressed, he immediately served the same upon him.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Maydole, and if it suits you as well to get in here as it does me to get out, we are both happy."

To this remark Norman simply bowed politely, and then said:

"If you will be good enough to show me over the place, and introduce me to the foreman, and such other persons as I may have most business with, I shall be glad at any time to return the favor, if in my power to do so."

"Certainly, certainly! Blethers is down in the mine at present, but I will introduce you to the amalgamator, the store-keeper, the postmaster, and—and—the boys generally."

"And the matter of lodgings——" Norman was beginning to say.

"You take my room, I suppose; right here in the office building." Here he opened the door leading to an adjoining room, and while exhibiting it to Norman, he added: "It is not very fine, but it is as good as any in camp."

"Good enough," said Norman.

"Well, it is a good enough room, but it should be fixed up—should have been done long ago—but I don't get on very well with Blethers, and have not expected to remain here, or I should have had it in better fix."

"Mr. Blethers is the foreman, is he not?"

"Well, yes. He is foreman, superintendent and everthing else in authority, except bookkeeper," and the retiring clerk looked upon Norman's modest young face in a way which said plainer than any words: "I pity you, my boy."

"If it is not disagreeable to you, I would like to have you tell me, briefly, in what style Mr. Blethers wields his authority."

"In this way, among other things. He runs the camp about as he pleases. He has a lot of men in here, some of whom—the most of them, in fact—will do just what he says; and the few men who differ with him find it to their best interest to keep mum. If you keep books and make out accounts to suit him, you're all right—if you don't you're all wrong. That's about the size of it;" and the clerk peered into Norman's eyes to see how he took a statement so alarming; but Norman looked as innocent as a lamb, and gave no further evidence of alarm than to ask if he could not put his small amount of luggage into the clerk's room.

"Why, of course," said the clerk. "Go in and take possession. The whole thing belongs to the company, except a few tricks I have in there, and I will give you most of them if you will receive them. I'll get right out of your way."

"No, no," said Norman, "I am in no hurry to get you out—take your leisure. I will find a room in the town somewhere for a time."

"I see you don't understand this country. About the only way to get a good, clean, quiet sleeping apartment in this camp is to build one and furnish it. You may get a bed in a lodging house, divided from other beds by cheap muslin and paper partitions, next door to a disorderly drunk on one side of you, and a husky bull-whacker, who snores worse than a fog horn, on the other side—but I'd advise you not to."

"What can not be cured must be endured."

"Well, if I was boss of the ranch any more I would propose that you sleep with me; but you have just let me out, you see."

"Oh, I see. But I beg you to continue to boss the ranch, in that regard, as long as you desire."

"In that case," answered the clerk, smiling, "we are all right. I take pleasure in offering you half my bed, Mr. Maydole and that is the highest point of hospitality reached among business men in these mountains; the sports and bar-keepers have been known to go further, but then they have manners peculiar to themselves."

Norman put his personal belongings into the room, and then the clerk proceeded to show him about the place and introduce him to the men—or, as they are commonly called, "old boys." After seeing the mill and the town he asked about the mine, and the clerk answered:

"The mine is further up the canon. I've never been there but once. Blethers runs that to suit himself. I have no authority for going down into it, and no taste for going underground if I had the authority. You'll have to get Blethers to take you round, and if he don't invite you down into the mine I guess you'll not go down."

"No?" responded Norman, interrogatively.

Just here, as they passed along the middle of the dry, hard street, they met a stalwart, broad-shouldered man, with his hands rammed half-way down under the waistband of his pantaloons, and arms akimbo, walking heavily, yet jauntily, down the canon. To this rather lofty personage the clerk said:

"Mr. Blethers, Mr. Maydole—the new clerk.

Mr. Blethers took his heavy right hand out of his waistband and shook hands with Mr. Maydole, saying he was glad to meet him, and then asked if he would not come in and "take a drink."

"No, thank you"—Mr. Maydole did not drink.

"Well, come and take a smoke, then."

"Much obliged"—Mr. Maydole seldom smoked.

"Well, then, come and see me take a drink," said Mr. Blethers, with a laugh that seemed to say he was doing a very humorous thing.

"Very good," said Norman. "I will go in and see how you do it in this part of the country."

"Are you a temperance man?" asked Blethers, as they entered the saloon.

"If you spell with a big T, I am not.

"I'm not much on the spell. Do you belong to the Templars or the Sons?"

"No, I do not."

"Well, then, take a drink," he said as they approached the bar where the glasses were being set up.

"No," said Norman, "I never drink unless I absolutely need it."

Blethers then called upon the few loungers in the house to come up, which they promptly did, and all except Norman, swallowed their drams—leaving him, in the eyes of that particular crowd, a rather contemptible minority. Then Blethers, the clerk, and Norman adjourned across the street to the office. Here Blethers drew from his breast pocket certain papers which he threw upon the desk in a grand sort of way, telling the clerk what record to make of them, after which he turned to Norman and catechised him regarding his knowledge of mines and mining, and this catechising eliciting nothing very satisfactory to him, he said:

"I knowed there was a new man a-coming, but I reckoned you knowed something about the business. I don't see what in hell the company means by changing clerks on me so often."

"There need be no anxiety about that in this case, I think," said Norman, in his quietest manner; "I'll keep the books straight enough."

Blethers looked at him in his lofty way which seemed to say, "I'll see about that," and then he went out.

Norman got on very well with the clerk. In fact, he soon began to like that person, and that person became rapidly attached to him, and aided him in every way he could to an understanding of the position and the people. They were thrown together day and night for several days, and Norman had thereby a better opportunity than he had expected to find out, without going out of his way, how matters stood in the town, and who was who.

"Blethers is going to put things up on you in this camp," said the clerk, in one of the many talks he had with Norman.

"Why do you think so?"

"I know he is by the looks of him. He began it the other day when he asked you to drink—you didn't—then he called up the stove-herders. That's his game. He wants to throw the boys against you on the start."

"The chances are not all be good in one direction. I will take mine on some other tack—that is, if I have need to take any chances."

"Well, I'm soon going to leave you to your fate. I've passed over everything in the office, and have told you all I know. Now I'm going out to fire the old loads out of my pistol and get it ready for the road."

"Wait a moment," said Norman, "my own pistol needs blowing out and reloading," and he passed into the bed-room: then, quickly returning, he and the clerk walked a few steps up the canon beyond the houses, chalked a white target-mark upon a cliff of rocks, and prepared to fire at it.

"Go ahead," said the clerk.

"After you," said Norman.

While the clerk was firing, there came Blethers and two of the men on their way up to the mine, and as pistol practice, at the animate or inanimate target, is an interesting theme in the mountains, they paused to see the shooting.

The clerk was not a bad shot, as shooters commonly go. When he had emptied his revolver, and all had examined his hits, he rechalked the target and said:

"Now, Mr. Maydole."

Norman took his position with his pistol in his hip-pocket. He stood there for a moment; then, drawing and commencing to fire in the same instant, he flattened rapidly, one after the other, the six balls against the chalked rock, and left the leaden imprint of all of them inside of a space which could be could be covered by a silver dollar.

The shooting being done with, Norman and the clerk turned away toward the office, while Blethers and the men with him proceeded up the canon.

"That young feller is a shooter for base," said the taller of the workmen, aiming his remark at Blethers.

"Umph!" grunted Blethers, "shootin'-gallery frills. Nothin' in it!"

"Aye!" said the other man, with a broad, English accent, "it's no' his shootin' as I wonders at—nobbut t' woy ee pulls t' pistol fro' his britchis be'ind. It's wot yo' Americans calls t' 'draw,' be'nt it?"

"Yes," answered the taller workman, "if he can draw and shoot that way when he means business, he's got the drop on a big majority of all the shooters ever I saw."

"Ho!" said Blethers, as the three trudged along, crunching over the loose stones in the road. "Fancy practice! Nothin' in it! Nothin' to it!" But his companions, though they dropped the subject, did not show by their looks that they agreed with him, as they passed out of sight around a bend in the canon road.

"That was a good job," said the clerk to Norman, as they two, on their return from the target, entered the office.

"Yes," responded Norman, "it is always best to keep a pistol fresh and clean."

"I don't mean the cleaning of the pistols—I mean your shooting."

"Oh, I am an old hand at target practice," said Norman in his easy, quiet way.

"I should say you were; but that is not the point I'm driving at."

"Is it not? Then I do not catch your meaning."

"My meaning is," said the clerk, with a gratified sparkle in his eyes, "that old bully Blethers got a bug in his wool. He claims to be a fighting chief, and thinks he can draw quicker and shoot deader than any man in the mountains; but you've laid him over, and he won't forget it."

"Well, yes. If a pistol is a good one, in good order, and well loaded, in a close fight most any kind of shooting will do—it is the nerve and draw which win."

"All right! You keep your eye on Blethers, because that little shooting will be all over this camp before morning, and Blethers won't like that a bit. Those two men who were with him don't like him. He don't like them. But they are A No.1 miners, and handy anyhow or anywhere, in a mine or about it. No mine can get along without such men. They are never drunk, never off, and they don't talk outside. I know them. They understand things. They will soon understand you, if I'm not mistaken, and it won't do you any harm to let them know you are on the square with them."

"If they can not find that out by my general conduct, I do not see how else I should get them to know it."

"That's all right. I'm not asking you to blow your own horn, but just to give the boys a pointer now and then. People sometimes don't see without a hint or two."

"What do you call these men?"

"The tall one's an American—Irish-American—Charley Fitzgibbon; went into the war at seventeen years old, in the first call for "three months'-men," and never left the service a day until he was honorably discharged after the fall of Richmond. The other is 'Cussin' Jack,' a west-country Englishman—gold miner from Georgia—who fought under the stars and bars all over the South. They live together, sleep together, work together—sort of social Siamese Twins."

"Why is the Briton called 'Cussin' Jack'—is he so profane?"

"No o," said the clerk, laughing; "that is miners' humor. He never was known to use profanity. He is a sort of Cornish-Puritan preacher, if you know what that is. Originally he was 'Con-in Jack,' but the miners have twisted it to suit themselves. On the books he is John Cadwai."

During the time of these conversations—and of may others which took place in the office between the same parties—day and night the mighty measured tread of the ore-stamps in the mill adjacent kept up its roar, making the atoms of gravel creep and nestle among the larger stones which lay about the staring white board-on-end building in which the office was. To a stranger's ear this ceaseless rhythmic roar in the otherwise silent land becomes at first a sort of grand, loud, yet muffled harmony; then a painful, thundering discord; still later a bearable monotony; and, finally, the agreeable pulsating music of prosperity. So agreeable does this music become that its cessation is an alarm; and when it dies out altogether, and the long rows of great iron stamps are "hung up" to rust between the massive posts which hold them, five in a place from post to post, the "camp" takes up its line of march in a "go-as-you-please" stampede to richer realms; and then a silence falls into the canon more dreary and oppressive than that which existed before man disturbed the "ancient, solitary region" of the speechless spirit of the desert. There is no picture more suggestive of desolation, more full of enforced silence, than a rusting, idle quartzmill among the steril hills of the silver land. The battle-field where glaring industry has been forced by the shadowy, gliding ghost of want to lay down his arms and march empty-handed away, is a sad appeal to the truly artistic—more pathetic than half the battle-grounds of contending empires.

But as long as the roar of the stamps reverberates along the rock-walled canon the reader need not apprehend any increase of desolation about the office where young Mr. Maydole is now fully installed—being left to his fate by his genial predecessor. Steadily and, politely, under the jarring music of the now to him unnoticed stamps, he attends promptly to his business. The men come on the monthly pay-day to find their accounts in exa...der, and the checks for the money ...o them ready for delivery. One by one they sign the pay-rolls, each opposite to his name, date of payment, and amount. Some sign with a heavy, wavering, horny-handed signature; others ask the new clerk to sign for them, while they, like the barons of old, add the chivalric sign of the cross; now and again one wields his pen with a rapid and easy grace, and leaves behind him an autograph ancestrally know in science, commerce, and letters. As they sign their names each takes his check, glances it over, tucks it away in his pocket, and walks heavily out. The great stamps go on and on, roaring and jarring. The men are paid up for the month. They have gone, and left the clerk to his books, his spider-like solitude, and the long, rolling monotone of the mill.

Day after day, often into the night, the new clerk, amid the continual noise, pursues his silent task. Now and again he locks his office doors, passes into the mill and around among its bewildering movements, asking questions of and speaking to the men concerning their various employments. At first they answer him coldly, even morosely; then, by and by, more cheerfully; and, after a time, more or less cordially. Little at a time he picks up the meaning of things, till gradually there awakes within him the latent mechanical lore of his race; then, like a vision, the whole business dawns upon him. Every wheel and crank, journal and boxing, pulley and belt, cog-wheel and lever, tub, settler, battery, engine, furnace and retort, becomes his intimate friend. He knows them all. Outside the mill he knows each driver and each mule by name—the capacity and present condition of every wagon. Nothing of the business is unknown to him save the cause of it all—the deep, dark delvings of the mine—over which, thus far, Blethers is king.

Several times our hero has gone to the mouth of the mine, inside of the building called the hoisting works, and has watched the hoisting machinery bringing up refuse rocks and precious ore—watched the coming up and going down of the men as they changed the gangs, or shifts; but at no time has he asked to be taken down into the mine, or in any way seemed to manifest any undue curiosity as to what might be going on below the earth's surface. This months passed away. He began to be looked upon as a very neat, cleanly, orderly, harmless young fellow, and polite, good clerk. The men looked pleasantly upon him on the pay-days in the office, and saluted him cheerily when ever he met them; even Blethers seemed to abate some of his loftiness in his presence.

One day, shortly after the latest pay-day, when the weight of the preceding month's business was well off his hands, he locked his office doors and strolled leisurely up to the mine, where he found "Cussin' Jack" out of doors, engaged in hewing heavy timbers. He sat down upon the hewn surface of the log, and fell into conversation with the hewer.

"Be yo' gettin' to feel whoam-loike up 'ere i' th' moines?"

"Yes. I like it first-rate."

"Well! T' boys be comin' to loike yo' a bit."

"Well, I like the boys."

"Yo' dew?"

"Yes."

"Why dost tha nivver coam out an' tak' a dram wi' 'em; or smoak a poipe?"

"I do not drink."

"Nor smoak?" asked Jack, as he still hewed to the black line he had struck upon the log.

"I can smoke, but I do not fancy tobacco."

"Tha'rt a rare un. T' boys think tha'rt a bit stiff an' 'igh tony i' thy ways."

"I do not mean to be stiff and high-tony. I work for my wages the same as they do—we are all in the same boat."

"Well zaid, lad, well zaid," and he stopped hewing, put the po'nt of his broad-axe on the log, and, crossing his arms, leaned upon the end of the handle, while he put one foot upon the timber, and asked: "D' yo' waant to know 'ow to put feither i' thy cap wi' t' boys i' this ere camp?"

"Yes," said Norman, "I would like to help the boys."

"Aye, I believe tha;" then he looked all about him, dropped his axe on the timber, lifted his black leather belt with one hand, and with the other hand fished out of his fob-pocket his last month's check, handed it to Norman, and, resuming his axe, went on hewing.

"This check is all right, is it not?" said Norman, when he had it unfolded.

"There's nowt amiss wi' t' check. There be'ent no better check az I knows on."

"What is the matter, then?"

"Well, it yo'k loike to gi' yo'rsen a lift wi' t' boys, stop payin' checks an' gi' us t' cash."

"Is not the check as good as cash?"

"Naw, it be'ent; not 'ere. T' store-keeimper shaives it, ivverabody shaives it; but t' cash, lad, gi' us t' cash. I be'ent a gossip talker. Go thy ways; but doant forgetten as I've telled tha to put a feither i' thy cap."

"I will remember it," said Norman, handing his check back to him.

"Go thy ways. An' tha gettest i' trouble i' the cash bissens, moind I tell tha, tha hast freinds i' the house o' Pharaoh."

Norman bade the hewer good-day, strolled about the mine-mouth and ore-house a short time, and then went back to his office, where he wrote a letter to his patron, from which the following is an extract:

"I think I am beginning to grasp the situation. I have delayed any examination of the mine. Have not yet made any demand for it, because I have wished to see my way in broad daylight first, before trying the darkness. The men still complain that their checks are shaved unmercifully by all to whom they present them, but most severely by the store, which the men call the 'company store.' They also complain that they are called upon, when working by contract, to receipt for more money than they receive, etc., etc. These latter matters (which I will report more at large by and by) can not now be affected by my present power; but if you will enable me to pay the men in cash—coin or gold-notes—altogether in cash, or half cash and half checks, it will distribute the wages of the men into more hands, make the men feel more independent, and therefore slightly weaken the hold which the present management has upon this people."

The letter had its effect. When the men came in to sign the pay-rolls of the succeeding month, they took their half cash with pleasant chaff and merry good humor. The outside store-keeper and other dealers did a better paying business than they had done for a long time. Even the gamblers and visiting priests and preachers were better off. All the ontgo was no longer re-absorbed by the mine management and the pet barnacles attached thereto. The men's checks were not now shaved to the bone. Gradually the wink passed from man to man, as they privately gave the new clerk credit for the improved financial condition.

The new clerk attended to all his business promptly and pleasantly. He treated the lofty Blethers with perfect respect. He also attended thoroughly to any reasonable demands made upon him by Blethers's pets—the store-keeper, the keeper of the boarding-house, the saloon man, the lodging-house person, and in fact all the pets who love to cluster about the management of a working mine. Notwithstanding his fairness, his civility, his attention to these persons, they were not happy; they did not like him, yet they could find no stable ground on which to assault his position.

Before the next pay-day drew nigh he wrote, in his regular monthly letter, to Colonel Holten as follows:

"The half-cash idea works well. The men are pleased with it. It you can make it all cash it will be still better. I am aware of the expense and risk in sending large sums of money, but I fully believe that it is better to do so, even if we should be robbed twice per year. As affairs now stand you virtually lose the money anyway. But I do not admit that we shall be robbed. If you express the money (after notifying me in the manner I have heretofore pointed out) as far as the express box comes, I think I can see it safe the remainder of the way."

This letter was also effectual. On pay-day the men were entirely satisfied. The trade was distributed throughout the camp, and that satisfied a majority of the people—but the Blethers crowd were not contented.

On a pleasant winter sunny Sunday, after pay day, Norman carfully locked up his office and betook himself to the road for a little exercise afoot. In his rambles he met many of the men, who now accosted him with very kindly cheeriness as they passed to and from their work—for there is neither night nor day, Sunday nor holiday, on a working mine. As he walked on, outside the village, he heard heavy steps at some distance behind him and gaining on his gait, till at last he was overtaken by two workmen, both large but one taller than the other, the shorter of whom, as he overtook Norman, said:

"Gl' us thy hand, lad. That's gotten it done, an' the feither is t' thy cap," and he shook hands heartily with Norman. "This is my pardner, Charley Fitzkibbin. E's a man as it's wuth thy whiles to know, lad, tho'ff I zay it to 'is faices."

Norman shook hands with Fitzgibbon, and they three went forward in the road together.

"Why don't you come down into the mine and take a look around?" asked Charley.

"I have not yet been invited," said Norman.

"The damned hog!"

"What!" exclaimed Norman, sharply.

"I don't mean you."

"E's a 'og—is Blethers."

"The boys down in the mine will be glad to see you. You come down and see us some time. We'll show you around and let you see some things you ought to know."

"You are very good," said Norman, "and I will be glad to be down in the mine as soon as business is so arranged that I can. In the meantime, if I have any friends down there, give them my best respects."

You bet your ribs you've got friends down there," said Charley, with an emphatic twist of his head.

"E 'ave that; an' top o' t'ground loikewoise."

"How is the mine looking?" asked Norman.

"It looks well enough for the way it is treated; you'll see how it is when you come down."

"I be'nt no wise shy o' tellin' wot I thinks o' t' moine to them as 'ave business wi' it. Blethers be 'oggin' on it for a freeze-hout. That's wot t' fact is. I knows a moin as well as 'ee do. This 'ere be a good little moine—in honest 'ands."

"Well, gen'lemen, I want very much to know all about the mine, and to thoroughly understand it; and I shall feel under obligation to you and to all who assist me to understand—not that I can hope to do more than to express the obligation. I have only my wages as you all have."

"We understand that," said Charley; "and we know that things is happenin' round here."

"Ave!" added Jack, "things do 'appen 'raand 'ere." And then both the men turned away into a branch road, laughing and shaking their broad shoulders as they went; leaving Norman to pursue his walk and return to his starting point, where the noise of the mill furnished him with music, while it reminded him constantly of the unfinished task he had in hand. He began to feel that he was not alone in his struggle for "a fair deal." As he sat on that Sunday evening in the office, reading one of the few choice books he had brought with him, he could hear the men in the saloons across the way, singing and laughing over their beer, but he could not hear the conversation at one of the tables in the saloon, where he was, in part at least, the subject under discussion.

"This new clerk is making himself damned fresh around here."

"I dunnot see but 'ee keeps hissen to hissen well's yo' do."

"Oh, Well, Jack, we won't fight about that; ours old Blethers's just billin'."

"Let um bile. 'Tweun't hurt us to bile. It dasn't spile bad eggs to cook um."

"But when he biles over he'll just kick the stuffin' all out o' that fancy young duck from 'Frisco."

"Don't you fool yerself about fancy young duck from 'Frisco. Ben Blethers jist better let that job out by contract."

This latter remark was made by a Johnny come lately to the camp.

"Dost tha' know t' lad?"

"No. I hain't no acquaintance with him, but I know who he is."

"Oo is 'ee?"

"He's the rooster that killed 'Cocho Pizan,' and cleaned out the stage robbers."

"Ego-h!" exclaimed "Cussin' Jack," striking the under side of his heavy fist upon the table, "I smells a rat. Gi' us anoother beer aw roond. Egosh! I thowt 'ee was no common chap fust toime I zeed un. When woz it 'ee plugged t' staige-robber?"

"Last spring, some time—May or June, I think."

"Egosh! I read un in nooze paiper. 'Ee's t' b'y is 'ee?"

Here the beer being served all round the table, Jack grasped his glass mug by the handle, rapped on the board, then raising the foam capped, brown liquor toward his lips, said:

"'Ere's to the lad as pays t' cash to a workin' man!" then, having swallowed his draught, he set down his half emptied mug and said:

"Summuns gotten sense at the 'ead o' this moinin' company."

"That's all right, Jack," said the speaker who had opened this dialogue; "but that won't save the boy from takin' a devil of a whallin' when Blethers gets despe-rate. He may be a good man of his size, but Blethers is too heavy for him."

"It be'nt big uns as wins aw the fights, them as sent un here knows un. 'Ee be'ent combd up 'ere for nowt. Yo' talk o' kickin' stuffin' out o' un—I tell tha wot, them as kicks stuffin out o' yon lad has gotten it to kick out o' moar than 'im. Stuffin will be cheap i' this camp. Them's the soothin remarks o' owd John Cadwal."

Thus and thuswise the men spent their Sunday evening, and many another evening, while the great stamps in the mill thundered and roared, and the clerk, mostly alone in his office, day and night, remained quietly at his post, the least obtrusive man in the camp.

But the storm was gathering about him. The day drew near when he must either bow to others or have them bow to him."

During one day of the week following the drinking bout, as above related, Blethers came across from the store to the office with a few papers in his hand, and, walking into the office, where Norman sat behind the counter at his desk, he tossed the papers over to the desk, saying:

"Contracts. I want them looked over, and I want you to draw checks for the amount due on them, and ask the men to indorse the checks, and then you hold them till I call for them. Understamme?"

"Yes, I understand you," said Norman, gently, as he took up the papers. Blethers turned on his heel and went out of the office. While Norman was carefully looking over the contracts, the second cook of the boarding house—one Ah Quong—came softly in with a bucket of water, a scrubbing brush, a hatchet, etc., and proceeded to take out the sash and clean the windows as he had been previously directed to do by Norman.

After reading the contracts, the clerk put them in the drawer of his desk, then said:

"Quong."

"What!"

"Sabe 'Long Johnson'?"

"Yes—too muchee."

"Go tell him come see me."

"All ligh'," and Quong came down off his step-ladder and went out. Presently the Asiatic returned, followed by a lengthy lathy Missourian.

"Mr. Johnson," said the clerk, "you are one of the parties to this contract, are you not?"

Johnson, standing outside the counter, took the paper, looked it over hastily, and said:

"Yes, Wolsey and me done that work," and passed the papers back to the clerk.

"How do you want your pay—cash or checks?"

"Well, I don't keer; I 'spose I mout's well hev the cash of you've got it."

"Suit yourself."

"Cash it is, then."

"All right; go and bring Woolsey here, and we'll settle up."

The Missourian left the room, the Chinaman was hed at the window, the stamps in the mill rose and fell and thundered, the clerk sat at his desk and wrote, when Blethers re entered, and, walking up to the clerk's counter, asked:

"Johnson been here?"

"Yes, sir."

"What'n hell'd *he* want?"

"Wants to settle up and get his money on his contracts."

"What'd you tell him?"

"Told him to bring Wolsey, and I would settle with them and pay them their money."

"They've got their money, by ——"

"Not from the company, I think."

"I tell ye, they've got their money. Understamme?"

"I think otherwise."

"I don't care a damn what *you* think! Understamme?"

"Yes, I understand you quite well."

"Well, then, see't you do what I ordered. Understamme?"

Norman made no reply to this last inquiry about "understamme" but went on figuring at his books. Blethers leaned against the counter as if waiting for a reply, but he got none.

"Are you going to get me them checks?" asked Blethers rather fiercely.

"No, sir," and Norman got down from his stool at the desk, and, coming up to the inside of the counter opposite to Blethers, he added: "This is a very simple matter of business, Mr. Blethers. Get a written order from the contractors, or, failing in that, serve me with a writ of attachment—otherwise I shall pay the men their money. I am not here to act as general collector of other people's debts, nor am I a constable."

"You're —— —— sneakin' —— —— ——. Understamme?" roard Blethers.

"You are a bully, and I think you are a coward," said Norman, folding his arms and looking in the flushed face of the now furious Blethers. He did not have long to look. Blethers reached across the counter fiercely, aiming to catch Norman by the throat. In his eager wrath he reached a little too far, and before he could recover his overreach, he had cause to imagine that the stamps in the mill next door were thundering about his jaws and ears. In the next minute, the Chinaman, glancing down from his step-ladder, beheld him prostrate on the office floor, which that amiable Asiatic no sooner saw than, clattering down his ladder, he grasped his hatchet and was about to finish him.

"Stop, Quong!" shouted Norman.

"Me likee you—no likee him," and again he made at the prostrate man with the hatchet. By this time Norman was by his side, and, taking him by the cue, held him back, saying:

"Let him alone, Quong."

"All ligh'! Me likee you—no likee him. Bi-m-bi him flend killee you—me sabe," said the Asiatic, as he replaced his hatchet on the window-sill and reclimed his ladder to resume his work.

Johnson had been gone a very short time, yet now, when he returned accompanied by Woolsey, it was evident that a revolution had taken place since he had last been in the room. He paused just inside the door; Woolsey paused in the doorway behind him, and rather to one side of him; both men looked at Blethers, who by this time was sitting on the floor with his legs stretched out in front of him, propping himself with one hand, while with the other he felt about his eyes and face for some confused clue to his surroundings, while Norman leaned with his back and elbows against the office-counter, surveying the field. Presently, Blethers, in the dim return of consciousness, with the instinct of habit, took his hand from his face, and half feebly tumbled around the region of his pistol-pocket, but the shining occupant of that pocket lay on the floor behind him, where it had fallen when the owner fell.

Johnson said nothing; Woolsey made no remark; Norman looked silently on; the Chinaman washed away at his window as if he had never seen, heard, read, or dreamed of anything unusual, and the great stamps in the mill thundered and crushed without ceasing.

"Please take him to his room," said Norman, pointing to his foe, who was now numbly gathering himself to his feet; "then come back, and I will pay you what is due you," and there was a cold, metallic ring to his usually soft voice.

The two men, without a word spoken between them, took the defeated man by his arms and were moving out of the office, when Norman stepped forward, and picking up the pistol, said:

"Here, take this with you. It belongs to him."

Then, when the men had gone away with Blethers, Norman entered his own room, washed his hands, adjusted his collar and cuffs, and came back to his desk.

Johnson and Woolsey did not return immediately—nor at all, that day. They were in demand after they took Blethers to his own place. They were called upon to recount what they had seen in the office, and every time they told it they were asked by some listener:

"Who done it?"

"Can't prove it by me," they each invariably answered.

"Ye don't s'pose that little feller put a head on big Ben Blethers, do you?"

"I tell ye, ye can't prove nothing by me," said Johnson.

"And there wasn't nobody there but Blethers an' him an' the Chinaman?"

"Them's all I seed thar."

"I didn't see no one else ther," said the reticent Woolsey.

"Then it must' a' been the little feller done it."

"Oh, no! It wasn't him," said the bar-keeper, who was ambitious of being a wag; "it was the Chinaman."

"Mebbe old Blethers had a fit."

"Damn close fit, too," said the bar-keeper, as he stood polishing his tumblers. "Hez he got much of a head on him?"

"Yes," said the bar-keeper, "he's got double mumps, ink-bottle eyes, and a Humboldt spud between 'em."

"Wellibedam," said each listener, reflectively.

The news of Blethers's defeat flew up and down the canon, from mouth to mouth, from cabin to cabin—into the mill, where it was shouted from lips to ears through the din of the roaring stamps—from team to team, as the drivers met in the road—and down into the mine, where, by low, deep voices, it was retailed in the glare of the dim lights, which burned with breathless silence.

Men desiring to see the battle-field made excuse to call at the office and inquire for Blethers.

"Not in at present," was the clerk's polite and brief reply to each inquirer, while he sat at his desk apparently absorbed in his duties. The men, after the fashion of the mountains (and perhaps the fashion is not confined to the mountains), would have liked Norman to come among them, to talk with them about the affair, and be patted on the back while he drank with them; but he was not that kind of a fighter. He had not sailed around the world.

When the Chinaman came out, bucket in hand, ladder on shoulder, after finishing his task, the idlers in camp interrogated him.

"John 'd you see that fight?"

"No see fightee."

"The hell you didn't!"

"No see 'to nodding—no sabe fightee."

"Well what's the matter with Blethers then?"

"Think so—him velle sick—no com' ta suppa."

"Ther'll be war in this camp when Blethers gets on his pins again," said one workman to another, whom he met on the street.

"Who'll make the war?" asked the party addressed.

"Blethers and his friends."

"Hain't got no friends but his pets, and they ain't got sand enough to stand up to a red-eyed gander."

"Well, they talk war."

"Let 'em talk—it's cheap—but they'd better hunt a change of climate. This air is too thin for 'em—that's what the boys say."

"All right! It suits your Uncle Reuben. I like the little clerk fust-rate."

"So do I; and he ain't so little, either, when you stand up to him."

During this general and scattering discussion, Norman Maydole Jr. was attending to his duties and reflecting. As he came across the street to his supper, with his left hand wrapped up in a handkerchief, the men, of whom there is always at least one gang ("shift they call it) off duty in a mining camp, looked at him, saluted him politely, but asked him no questions.

When he went back to his office, after supper, he wrote to Colonel Holten, in part, as follows:

"Herewith I send you statements in detail of last month's business. I hope you will not fail to note a slight improvement—an increase of yield, a decrease of cost, and I think no increase of wear and tear, or neglect of supplies. This improvement is not directly, but perhaps is indirectly, attributable to my presence here. Since they find that they are to be fairly treated, the men do more and better work. The management has, for certain reasons, been more careful and less lavish of expenditure. If you think best, you may tell the stock-holders generally that they shall, from a time forward, have every cent the mine can be made to earn as long as I remain here. I can never be able to explain to you how I have arrived at so confident a conclusion. I can not explain it to myself, but—well, in fact I have grasped the situation, and shall hold it. I had a personal encounter to-day with Mr. Blethers, the foreman, because he used vile language to me and attempted to assault me. I am satisfied with the result, and I hope that he is. Next month, if nothing disastrous happens, I expect to report a general improvement."

This portion of the letter was thoroughly understood and appreciated at the home office in San Francisco.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Don't quarrel. People talk of lovers' quarrels as rather pleasant episodes—probably because they are not quarrels at all. She pouts; he kisses. He frowns; she coaxes. It is half play, and they know it. Matrimonial quarrels are a different thing. I doubt seriously if married people ever truly forgive each other after the first falling out. They gloss it over; they kiss and make up; the wound apparently heals, but only, as some of those horrible wounds given in battle do, to break out again at some unexpected moment. The man who has sneered and said cruel things to a sensitive woman never has her whole heart again. The woman who has uttered reproaches to a man can never be taken to his bosom with the same tenderness as before those words were spoken. The two people who must never quarrel are husband and wife. One may fall out with kinsman, and make up, and be friends again. The tie of blood is a strong one, and affection may return after it has flown away; but love, once banished, is a dead and buried thing. The heart may ache, but it is with hopelessness. It may be impossible to love any one else, but it is more impossible to restore the old idol to its empty niche.